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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP (BJACKSON), NEA/PPD (DBENZE), IIP/NEA/SCA (SLECHTENBER-KASTEN), IIP/G/IR (MBRYANT)
ABU DHABI FOR IRO CARLA HIGGINS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PROGRAM EVALUATION: SSI SPEAKER IMAM SOHAIB SULTAN VISIT TO KUWAIT, SEPTEMBER 17-20, 2006

¶1. FY06Q4 GPRA SUMMARY: Trinity College's Imam Sohaib Sultan visited Kuwait as a Strategic Speaker Initiative spokesperson conducting a four-day tour from September 16 - 20, 2006. Imam Sultan discussed the status and history of Muslims in America, with diverse audiences, including more than 250 students at the Universal American (High) School, American University of Kuwait (AUK), Gulf University for Sciences and Technology (GUST) and Kuwait University's College of Arts, History and Social Sciences. Imam Sultan also met with officials at the Kuwait Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and with Muslim leaders and intellectuals at a special gathering hosted by the Deputy Chief of Mission at his residence. He stressed moderation in Islam and the importance of dialogue and linking people from America and the Islamic world. Imam Sultan delivered a moving address at the Post's Alumni USA event, took part in a press roundtable, and appeared on Al-Rai satellite TV. Positive coverage of the roundtable discussion and other events appeared in all Arabic and English Kuwaiti dailies.

END SUMMARY.

Encouraging Dialogue and Understanding

¶12. Imam Sultan spoke on multiple topics including the history of Islam in the U.S., American-Muslim organizations, contemporary scholarship among American-Muslim scholars, moderation in Islam, and interfaith dialogue.

¶13. On September 17, Imam Sultan addressed a group of 160 high school students and teachers at the Universal American School. He spoke about the challenges of growing up in today's world, stressing the need for interfaith dialogue and improving relations between people in the east in the west, as both have profound misconceptions about the other. The students asked a barrage of diverse and thoughtful questions, showing their interest and connection with the speaker, including challenging the legitimacy of suicide bombings. Imam Sultan argued that they are antithetical to Islamic teaching and, therefore, are forbidden. Regarding the Pope's comments, the Hartford Seminary master's degree candidate on Christian-Muslim relations encouraged Muslims to accept the Pope's apology and enter into a dialogue to maintain the beneficial ties generally held between Muslim and Catholics in America, and on the Palestinian-Israeli crises.

Opening New Doors

¶14. Imam Sultan also visited the Quran Learning and Recitation Center in the distant town of Sulaybikhat. Arranged by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, this was the first such visit by Embassy Officers or visitors. He observed the Quranic recitation classes and spoke with the center's leaders about the goals and purpose of their programs. He also had a series of high-level meetings at Kuwait's state Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. He met with the Assistant Undersecretary for Hajj Affairs and the

Head of Fatwa and Research at the Ministry. They informed the visitor of the GOK's conference for American Muslim leaders on moderation in Islam in Washington, D.C., November 17-19, 2006.

Tackling Tough Questions

¶15. Imam Sultan delivered lectures at the History Department and Shari'a College as well as a discourse at the American Corner at Kuwait University, which was attended by a record number of more than 50 male and female students. He also spoke at the private American University of Kuwait (AUK) and over 40 students and faculty attended his lecture at Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST). Questions focused on perceived anti-Muslim policies in America, such as wire-tapping and racial profiling. Imam Sultan explained that these issues were under debate in America as well and that the American-Muslim community has been outspoken in defending the rights of Muslims through institutions such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (www.cairnet.org), and that American-Muslims have the right and freedom to disagree with certain U.S. government policies.

Linking East and West

¶16. Imam Sultan took part in a special "diwaniya" gathering at the Deputy Chief of Mission's Residence attended by an audience of 20 influential and conservative Muslims (including conservative "Islamist" leaders and writers.) Imam Sultan described the development of Muslim thought in America and contemporary trends, which includes a rise and return to traditional teachings. He cited organizations such as the Zaytuna and Nawawi Foundations, as new centers dedicated to reviving traditional scholarship based on the concept of moderation as a requirement in Islamic teaching. He also

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met with liberal leaders of the Kuwait Youth Organization to encourage them to reach out to their peers in the U.S. to increase mutual understanding between Americans and Kuwaitis.

Message of Tolerance Receives a Welcoming Response

¶17. A young, soft-spoken and appealing speaker, Imam Sultan easily connected with Post's target audiences of all ages. The questions and answers session at lectures lasted longer than expected, and he often lingered after programs ended to discuss ideas with students hungering for answers to a range of critical questions. He successfully delivered the message that Muslims in America have full rights, the friendship of other religious groups, and the number of Muslims in America continues to grow and integrate well with American society--ideas often in question in the Muslim world outside of the U.S.

...And, Outstanding Media Coverage

¶18. Overall, press coverage of the Imam's visit was excellent, including broad reporting of his roundtable discussion with journalists, his university lectures and his visit to the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

09/19/06 The Daily Star p. 2 1/8 page
09/19/06 Kuwait Times p. 6 1/8 page
09/19/06 Arab Times p. 3 1/8 page 1 photo
09/19/06 Al-Seyassah p. 8 1/4 page 1 photo
09/19/06 Al-Anbaa p. 12 1/2 page 2 photos
09/19/06 Al-Watan p. 12 1/2 page 1 photo
09/19/06 Al-Rai Al-Aam p. 20 1/2 page 1 photo
09/19/06 Al-Qabas p. 10 1/2 page 2 photos
09/21/06 Al-Anbaa p. 19 1/16 page 1 photo
09/21/06 Arab Times p. 2 1/4 page 1 photo
09/21/06 Al-Qabas p. 14 1/4 page 2 photos
09/21/06 Al-Seyassah p. 9 1/4 page 1 photo
09/28/06 Kuwait Times p. 3 1/8 page 1 photo

Superb Choice of Speaker

¶9. Post thanks IIP/G/NEA for arranging Imam Sultan's visit to Kuwait, as a U.S. Strategic Initiative Speaker. His extended five-day program coincided with the visit of Dr. Sarah Brewer from American University, and other Public Affairs programs, including the Embassy's USG Program Alumni Networking Event held on September ¶17. This took place during the first week of the academic year and a few days before the start of Ramadan. Imam Sultan was an engaging and enthusiastic interlocutor for Kuwaiti target audiences as well as an exceptional active listener. PA Kuwait highly recommends Imam Sultan to other posts in the region.

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